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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Some highlights on national trends in sustainable forest management

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Introduction

1. The present addendum highlights some of the recent national developments in sustainable forest management. The report is based exclusively on the national information on forests submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development for its eighth session. As of 14 January 2000, 34 countries had submitted information on forests to the Commission for its eighth session.[1] These national reports have also been utilized in the report on chapter 11 of Agenda 21,[2] on combating deforestation, prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as task manager.

2. In addition to national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development,[3] a large amount of national information already exists on forests and national progress towards sustainable forest management within the United Nations system and other international organizations. Information has been collected and reported recently on a global scale within the FAO survey on the status and progress in the implementation of national forest programmes, 1998; FAO's *State of the World's Forests 1999*,[4] and the FAO Forest Resources Assessment for the Year 2000 (FRA 2000).

3. Keeping in mind this vast amount of information already disseminated, recent developments in international forest policy as well as the cross-sectoral nature of forest issues (that is to say, their having linkages to many other sectors), the national guidelines for reporting on forests to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session aimed at seeking information only on selected issues relevant to the overall work programme of the eighth session of the Commission. Accordingly, the present report summarizes national trends in sustainable forest management with emphasis on overall land management, poverty, and production and consumption aspects; implementation of proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF); and work on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management as well as experiences with certification.

I. Basic trends in sustainable forest management

A. Forest resources

4. Countries in different parts of the world that provided reports on forests this year showed significant differences in progress towards sustainable forest management. Most of the tropical developing countries indicated that deforestation and forest degradation were still the most serious problems, and, in many cases, increasingly so, owing to lack of alternative income opportunities for rural poor, forcing them to expand agriculture on forest land, as well as to overuse and irrational use of forest resources by the forest industry in some cases. In contrast, most developed countries have seen an increase of their forest cover, but they face problems in respect of forest health, such as pests, pollution and fires, in some cases. They are also more aggressively pursuing policies that consolidate the concept of sustainable development and thus have encountered some problems associated with compromising among different interests and priorities.

5. In many tropical developing countries, efforts are under way to improve governance, and mechanisms have been put in place, for example, to direct part of

the income increases generated by increased wood exportation, to reforestation programmes. Despite these efforts, there are still serious overall difficulties in implementing the concept of sustainable forest management in the field owing to traditional and cultural extractive practices as well as lack of means for controlling illegal practices. Some countries clearly admitted that many of the legal and financial arrangements established to combat deforestation and forest degradation had failed.

6. Planted forests have become increasingly important with respect to diminishing the intervention in natural forests for wood supply. This issue is particularly important in tropical developing countries, but not exclusively; for example, vast programmes for afforestation are under way in China, among many other countries. There are also an encouraging number of examples of afforestation projects in countries where little forests have ever existed naturally, or where forests have been nearly completely destroyed over the centuries, such as Israel, Turkey and Uzbekistan. In developed countries, the major reason for the increased forest area has been afforestation, usually of abandoned agricultural land. The efficiency of wood utilization in many developed countries has also greatly improved, and forest health is gradually recovering, although serious problems still exist owing to airborne pollution, pests and fires, both domestic and transboundary. In countries with economies in transition, the health of forests is also stabilizing, although it is still generally worse than the European average. For example, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan mentioned fires as an increasing threat to their forests — one that posed a major challenge to their forest services.

7. There is also an increasing interest worldwide in the establishment of protected forest areas, in particular regional representative systems. For example, in one of its biggest land conservation efforts ever, the United States of America plans to protect an additional 16 million hectares of federally owned forest lands from road building and commercial development. The increase of protected areas for the conservation of biodiversity, recreation and scientific purposes is emphasized more by those developed countries where the economic value of forests is less significant or where the importance of recreational and environmental aspects has increased in the eyes of the public. Many European countries, where forest estates in general are small, emphasized small-scale nature-emulating practices to protect forest resources.

B. Decision-making

8. National forest policies have been increasingly influenced by globalization of the forest sector and by international commitments, specifically those made in the conventions established after Rio and to some degree IPF and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) (1997-2000), in addition to various regional arrangements and initiatives, such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty and the Pan-European forest process.

9. A notable trend is that forest-related decision-making has become increasingly participatory, involving the private sector, non-governmental organizations and indigenous and local communities, among others. However, some countries admitted that the effective participation of civil society had not been achieved sufficiently. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Belgium, Governments have actively promoted such participation but many of

the stakeholders do not necessarily see themselves as having a part to play in sustainable forest management, even though their activities do influence it.

10. Many countries reported that the national environmental programmes, in some cases together with national forest programmes, serve as overall coordinating mechanisms for forest-related policies. Several Latin American countries said that they had no clear mechanisms for harmonization of policies. Also, a number of countries in transition and developing countries indicated that overall reforms in the environmental sector tended to steal the attention and resources from the forest sector, and that cooperation and coordination between the sectors were still rare.

11. Serious efforts are under way to revise or establish national forest programmes according to the recommendations of IPF, and to make them an integral part of land management policies as well as overall sustainable development strategies. New orientations influencing national forest programmes include:

(a) Intensification and expansion of the management of forests, including the encouragement of private land owners to actively participate in forest management planning;

(b) A shift from short-term planning towards sustained and long-term forest management planning based on an ecosystem approach with close linkages to overall land management;

(c) Increasing attention to conservation of biological diversity, and the role of forests in protecting water supply and catchment areas, protecting soil from erosion, protecting land from desertification, and protecting against the increasing occurrence of natural disasters such as drought, flood and high winds, and of climate change;

(d) Recognition of the significant role of forests in the well-being of people (income and employment, through timber production, non-wood products and ecotourism and health);

(e) Enhancement of sustainable production and consumption patterns, including, for example, the recycling of paper. In some developed countries, the recycling rate of the consumed paper is relatively high, though it varies by country (for example, some 35 per cent in Belgium, 50 per cent in Australia, 61 per cent in Germany and 75 per cent in Sweden). In most developing countries, recycling programmes do not exist, but wood waste, for example, from cutting and the sawn wood industry, is reused as an energy source;

(f) Development of forest industries, including commercialization and increasing value of products;

(g) Continuous inputs on research, emphasized, in particular, by China, Japan, Lithuania, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Slovenia.

12. In most developed countries, basic property rights are guaranteed by their constitutions. Some progress has been made worldwide in also recognizing customary and traditional rights. Some examples of progress in this field include: the right of indigenous people to negotiate in relation to actions that may affect the use and enjoyment of their native title and the right to veto mining exploration on aboriginal land (Australia); investigations of the legal status of the land rights of reindeer-breeding indigenous Sami people (Finland, Sweden); the establishment of

boundaries where groups make traditional use of resources on federally owned land (Russian Federation); and the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights in legislation (Ecuador, Mexico), or efforts to achieve such recognition (Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Turkey). In many other developing countries, the traditional and customary rights are still often without legal basis. One of the most salient recent changes in countries in transition is liberalization of the management of private forest lands. The number of small private forest holdings is rapidly increasing owing to intensive restitution of property rights and privatization activities. Also, therefore, stimulation for the cooperation between forest owners and administration as well as extension services for private owners is emerging.

13. In some developed countries, government compensates landowners or forest managers for providing environmental non-market benefits to society. In others this is simply considered part of the regulated responsibilities of a landowner, who, in some cases, is solely the Government itself, as is the case for Kazakhstan. When support is available, it is mainly for protecting the forests in order to conserve biological or cultural values, but also for enhancing wildlife habitats, recreation opportunities and landscape, and making forests accessible to the public. In countries where there are privately owned forests, Governments usually contract or buy forest land from private owners to increase protected areas, as is the case in Australia. In many countries, both developing and developed, financial support is available also for afforestation and reforestation purposes aiming at combating deforestation, or timber production, or at contributing to the carbon balance. A few countries reported that forest owners or land managers who managed their forests according to sustainability criteria set by the Government (for example, in Belgium) or had their sustainable forest management plans approved by the Government (for example, in the Dominican Republic) could receive financial support or tax relief.

II. Implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)

14. IPF was established in 1995, under the Commission on Sustainable Development, to continue the intergovernmental forest policy deliberations following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The intensive work resulted, in 1997, in over 100 negotiated proposals for action on a number of issues related to sustainable forest management directed to countries, international organizations and major groups.

15. Those few developing countries that provided more elaborate information on the assessment of the relevance of the IPF proposals considered them useful with respect to guiding national forest policy, in particular as regards impacts of forests on development, forest inventories, reforestation and sustainable use of resources. For example, Honduras, which had evaluated the relevance of the IPF proposals for action in depth within the so-called six-country initiative,[5] emphasized overall policy development, including enhancement of public participation, national forest programmes, criteria and indicators, combating deforestation, and forest biodiversity, as well as application of innovative mechanisms for financing sustainable forest management and conservation. Some countries, for example, Myanmar, underlined the specific importance of the national forest programme as an

exercise enhancing overall development of the forest sector as well as environmental conservation and restoration.

16. Many countries in transition reported on having assessed the relevance of the IPF proposals for action. They saw IPF as extremely useful in guiding the national policy, *inter alia*, with respect to the new trend of involving the private sector and non-governmental organizations in the development of forest legislation and policies. The national programmes in these countries give particular emphasis to afforestation, rural development, rehabilitation of damaged forest lands, promotion of private sector activities, and evaluation of long-term trends in supply and demand of forest products.

17. Developed countries, in general, pointed out progress, owing to the IPF proposals for action, in revising or elaborating new national forest programmes, national forest inventories, criteria and indicators, as well as in respect of the participation of various stakeholders in decision-making. Emphasis was also given to multiple benefits and functions of forests; further reduction of airborne pollution; improvement of national coordination mechanisms; and trade issues, in particular certification, as well as traditional forest-related knowledge. For some countries, the IPF proposals have not represented a radical change, since many of the proposals are already found, at least to some extent, in existing practices and legislation.

New areas of interest in global forest policy deliberations

18. In addition to specifically emphasizing the importance of some of the topics that had already been deliberated during the IPF and IFF processes, countries also listed some additional issues that they deemed would be useful if included in any future international arrangement on forests, *inter alia* (albeit not in any specific order):

(a) Improvement of support for forest management, including better identification and prioritization of national and international technical and financial resources, as well as ways and means to better position the forest sector in development cooperation and in sustainable development strategies;

(b) Ensuring the proper reflection in other instruments of the outcome of the IPF/IFF process (in particular the Kyoto Protocol[6] to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[7]);

(c) Improvement of mechanisms for cross-sectoral policy coordination;

(d) Enhancement of participation of, and cooperation among, the different stakeholders;

(e) Means for better communication and public awareness raising;

(f) Improvement of information systems and forest research, in particular forest valuation methods;

(g) Support for measures to avoid natural disasters (vulnerability);

(h) Specific questions related to forests and rural development;

(i) Combating forest fires, including the establishment of a forest fire monitoring network for forecasting and timely prevention.

III. Criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management

19. There is a vast and increasing interest in the work on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Nearly all countries reported activities within the regional and international criteria and indicators initiatives including the Pan-European forest process, the Montreal process, the Dry Zone Africa, North Africa, Near East, and Central America initiatives, the Tarapoto Proposal, and the initiatives of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and African Timber Organization. Many countries have also developed their own national set of criteria and indicators and use them as a tool for reporting, policy development and policy monitoring.

20. The work on criteria and indicators has brought together different interest groups and enhanced the definition of, and mutual understanding on, the concept of sustainable forest management. In many countries, the national work has pointed out data needs for measuring sustainability in forest management, especially as related to biodiversity and socio-economic issues. Several countries reported difficulties in obtaining data on private forests. However, in some other cases, the results have already been reflected in the revisions of national policies and programmes by corrective actions, which should, in time, lead also to improvements in the field. It was stated that among the future challenges was the need to promote the wider use of criteria and indicators in international reporting, as well as the enhancement of wider compatibility among various international initiatives.

IV. Experiences with certification

21. Certification of forest management has gained increased attention recently. Voluntary certification schemes, usually initiated by environmental non-governmental organizations or the private sector, and related forest certification standards are being discussed and developed in many countries, and some are already in use. For example, relatively large areas, amounting to several million hectares, have already been certified in Sweden (Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)) and in Finland (according to a national standard initiated by the private sector). Certification schemes were mentioned by some countries as being able to push management practices beyond legislated norms in some forest areas.

22. Some countries feel that for forest products to be certified it is sufficient that they be derived from forests managed in accordance with the current national regulations. Some other countries, on the other hand, say that certification standards should be tighter than national regulations. These opposite views have affected the development of certain schemes. Consequently, at present, the requirements for certification vary considerably, and this has also caused some confusion among the consumers. In some countries, the recent negative changes in timber markets have slowed down the concrete steps towards the development of certification.

23. In general, certification is considered one tool among others to promote sustainable forest management and to provide information to customers on wood originating from sustainably managed forests. According to some small-scale pilot experiences in Belgium, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate has not influenced prices so far. There are also examples where an industry has found it difficult to access markets, like the furniture industry that does not use certified

wood (Slovenia). The processes of developing certification standards and schemes have been seen as supportive to competence-building and awareness-raising among the participant stakeholders. However, in some cases they have caused clashes between environmental groups that usually favour FSC and other stakeholders.

V. Future challenges

24. The most acute and frequently repeated challenges mentioned to the Commission on Sustainable Development in the national reports on forests were: decreasing the alarming rate of deforestation; further protecting forests, as part of sustainable forest management practices, as well as increasing the areas of protected forests; improving national institutions; and continuously developing assessments and databases of forest resources (see annex). Furthermore, although progress to various degrees has been made in coordination between the forest and related sectors at the national level, its further improvement is still a continuing goal with respect to ensuring that all cross-sectoral issues of forests are sufficiently considered. The development of a well-functioning forest industry, providing a major link in the sustainable forest management equation, was also mentioned as a major challenge.

Notes

[1] Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Honduras, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Norway, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uzbekistan. The European Commission also submitted information.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[3] Over 100 countries submitted national information on forests also to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session (1997) as part of the country profile covering information on all chapters of Agenda 21. All this information is available on the web site (http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/).

[4] Rome, FAO, 1999.

[5] Finland, Germany, Honduras, Indonesia, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

[6] FCCC/CP/1997/7/Add.1, chap. I, decision 1/CP.3, annex.

[7] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

Annex

Highlights of the major future challenges reported according to different types of countries

Developed countries with high forest cover emphasize multiple functions of forests and balance between all aspects of sustainable forest management. The major challenges are related to:

- Encouragement of sustainable production and consumption, including the use of wood;
- Enhancement of socio-economic issues, such as employment;
- Improvement of the health of forests.

Developed countries with low or relatively low forest cover focus on environmental and social aspects of sustainable forest management, in particular the conservation of biological diversity and the recreational activities in forests. The major challenges are related to:

- Afforestation, in particular with the view to mitigating global climate change;
- Maintaining and improving forest-related cooperation activities.

Developing countries (or countries with economies in transition) with high forest cover use their forests especially for economic development. The major challenges are related to:

- Implementation of the concept of sustainable forest management in policies as well as in practice, especially in order to decrease the alarming rates of deforestation;
- Development of efficient institutional structures;
- Development of a well-functioning forest industry and elimination and control of illegal logging;
- Further consideration of environmental values of forests.

Developing countries (or countries with economies in transition) with low forest cover use forests for subsistence. Major challenges are related to:

- Improvement of the conditions of the forests-dependent rural poor by providing alternatives for income-generation;
- Afforestation and restoration of degraded forest lands;
- Promotion of the role of forests in combating soil erosion and desertification.